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Chairperson: Mrs. Juul ..... (Norway)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda items 82 to 97 (*continued*)

Thematic discussion on item subjects and introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions submitted under all disarmament and international security agenda items

The Chairperson: Today we will have our thematic discussion on the subject of other disarmament measures and international security. However, as I mentioned previously, I will allow those remaining delegations that, on Friday, 13 October, were unable to make their statements on conventional weapons or to introduce draft resolutions to do so today.

Before we proceed, the Committee will first have a panel discussion with Mr. Hans Blix, Chairman of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. Afterwards, Mr. John Barrett, Chairman of the Panel of Government Experts on Verification, will be our guest speaker. I first call on Mr. Blix to make his statement.

Mr. Blix (Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission): Let me first, Madam, thank you and the Committee for giving me this opportunity to address the Committee during its thematic discussion. My comments will touch upon many matters that are covered by items on the Committee's agenda. I shall make my comments against the background of the analysis and recommendations contained in the report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, which I have had the honour to chair. Representatives will find copies of the report on their desks. However, the comments are, of course, my own.

The report is entitled "Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms", and copies are available to all members. It was adopted unanimously by the 14 members of the Commission and was launched here at the United Nations on 1 June this year. It discusses and seeks to tackle the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and it contains 60 concrete recommendations for action. Its central message is that the global process of arms control and disarmament, which has stagnated in the last decade, must be revived and pursued in parallel with the efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction to further States and to terrorists. The report deals with all types of weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, biological and chemical — but my remarks today will focus primarily on the threats posed by nuclear weapons and by States.

Some might argue that there is no need for further global disarmament and arms control, pointing to the reduction that has taken place in nuclear arsenals — from an estimated number of more than 50,000 to 27,000 weapons, including a dramatic reduction in, or withdrawal of, tactical weapons under the 1991 Bush-Gorbachev presidential nuclear initiative. Another reduction, also unverified, is to be expected by 2012 under the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty. While that is most welcome, it relates to what the States concerned themselves consider to be surplus

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weapons. What remains after those reductions is ample to destroy our planet. What is acutely worrisome is that many developments are going in the wrong direction. Let me give a few examples.

Several nuclear-weapon States do not give pledges against a first use of nuclear weapons. The development of a missile shield in the United States is perceived by China and Russia as a measure potentially allowing the United States to threaten them, while creating immunity for the United States. Countermeasures can be expected. The development and testing of new types of nuclear weapons is being urged by influential groups in the United States, and in the United Kingdom many expect a Government decision about a renewal of the nuclear weapons programme, stretching it far beyond 2020. The stationing of weapons in space is being considered in the United States. If that were to occur, other States might follow and threats may arise to the world's peaceful uses of space and the enormous investments that have been made in that regard.

When we regard those developments as deeply worrisome and threatening, it is because they increase the risk of the use of weapons. It is the use of the weapons that kills. We might do well to remember that the international community's early approach to weapons of mass destruction was in the form of bans on use, not bans on production. That was true of the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, as well as of all rules in those matters adopted earlier in The Hague Conventions.

With the emergence of nuclear weapons and their horrendous effects at the end of the Second World War, two new avenues were followed by the world community. First, the threat or use of force — any force — against the territorial integrity and political independence of any State was prohibited in Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations. The outlawing of all use of armed force, if effective, would evidently constitute an assurance against the use of nuclear force. There were, however, two exceptions to the rule set out in Article 2, paragraph 4. The first was Article 51, which preserved the right to self-defence when an armed attack occurred, until the Security Council had taken the necessary measures. The other exception allowed the use of armed force in situations that constituted threats to the peace, breaches of the peace or acts of aggression. While that category of situations was broader than that of an armed attack, the use of force in those cases was subject to decision by the Security Council. The Security Council had, and still has, much broader authority to authorize the use of armed force than that of the right to self-defence, which is limited to cases of armed attack.

A second approach was based on the thought that the best guarantee against the use of a weapon would be in assuring the absence of the weapon through bans on production, acquisition and stockpiling. Already in 1946 the General Assembly had declared its determination to physically eliminate atomic weapons — as it called them — and other weapons of mass destruction. However, while violations of a ban on the use of weapons of mass destruction would, in all likelihood, be visible, a violation of a ban on stockpiling could be hidden. To be reliable, the new approach prohibiting production therefore required international inspection. The authors of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) did take an important step beyond the 1925 Protocol, prohibiting the production and stockpiling of biological weapons. However, during the cold war they were not able to agree on machinery for verification and inspection. The Soviet Union and Iraq, and perhaps others, were later able to violate the ban imposed by the BWC without being detected at the time.

I should add that the absence of machinery for inspection and/or monitoring remains a weakness in the BWC. In recommendations 31 to 35 of the WMD Commission report, we have included a number of ideas for the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, including the establishment of a unit of experts on biological weapons, similar to the roster of inspectors we had at our disposal in connection with the Iraq inspections, which I headed.

Finishing their work after the end of the cold war, the authors of the 1996 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were able to establish machinery for inspection and verification with regard to the universal ban on the use, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons. The WMD Commission makes several recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of the Convention, including speeding up the destruction of chemical weapons. However, the Convention is seen by the Commission as a success story.

The situation of nuclear weapons is different from that of biological and chemical weapons. While the International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion, saw an extremely limited scope for the legal use of nuclear weapons, a convention banning their use has not been attainable. Their elimination has not been achieved, but it has been sought through a fragmentary approach. I will specify how.

The first element is to ban the deployment of nuclear weapons in various environments — the Antarctic, the seabed and outer space — which is the Bonn approach. The second is to eliminate their qualitative development through treaty bans on testing, including the Partial Test Ban Treaty and the following treaties. The third is to limit the possession of nuclear weapons through the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones, which limit the possession of such weapons in particular areas and among States adhering to the NPT. The fourth is to oblige nuclear-weapon States parties to the NPT to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament — this is also evident — aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons in due course through successful negotiations. The last way is to issue guarantees against use, on certain conditions, to States forgoing nuclear weapons: negative security guarantees.

When we consider the threat of nuclear weapons today, it is important to remember both of the basic approaches that the world has taken: the general prohibition of the use of force — including by nuclear means — and the physical elimination of nuclear weapons. Those two approaches are related. As stated in the European Union Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction:

> "The best solution to the problem of proliferation of WMD is that countries should no longer feel they need them. If possible, political solutions should be found to the problems, which lead them to seek WMD. The more secure countries feel, the more likely they are to abandon programmes".

In examining cases of non-compliance, the WMD Commission notes on pages 66 and 67 of its report that

> "In many cases, perceived threats to security have been the incentive for the acquisition of nuclear weapons and security guarantees of various kinds have offered disincentives. It is not unreasonable to think that the Governments of Libya, Iran and North Korea, often isolated, have convinced themselves that their security was threatened. In the case of Iran there was also a very real threat from Iraq, which armed itself with WMD and used chemical weapons against Iran during the long war of the 1980s. It is possible that in such States incentives to acquire nuclear weapons may be reduced by offers of normal relations and by assurances that military intervention or subversion aiming at regime change will not be undertaken."

In the case of North Korea, the Six-Party Talks — which have been suspended for about one year and whose revival is sought — seem to have proceeded on the basis of that philosophy. Individual national postures are more varied.

At this point, I would like to add that it would be of equal, if not greater, importance if all United Nations Members, in order to help convince States that they do not need weapons of mass destruction, followed a practice of genuine respect for the already existing Charter restraints on the threat or use of force, as set out in paragraph 4 of Article 2, to which I have referred. If all States followed a practice of respecting those restrictions, specific individual assurances against the use of force would not be needed; they would be redundant.

I now turn to the NPT. We often hear warnings that the most central global instrument in which States have committed themselves not to acquire nuclear weapons and to pursue nuclear disarmament is in risk of collapse. While readily recognizing that the Treaty is under strain, the Commission notes that the world is not replete with would-be violators and that the overwhelming commitment to the Treaty remains of tremendous value. Iraq and Libya were found to be in violation of the Treaty and have been brought back into compliance with it. In two other cases, North Korea and Iran, the world is now actively seeking solutions. Are there any other problematic cases? Not to my knowledge.

Does the verification system — the safeguards system — need to be strengthened? Yes. Universal acceptance of the additional protocol, which is our third recommendation, would do much to strengthen confidence. The effective functioning of the safeguards system should never have to suffer for financial

reasons. It would be paradoxical, in my view, for the world community to spend billions on inspections to ensure that no material or equipment of nuclear relevance is transported in containers or baggage in air travel and then to deny the IAEA safeguards system its fullest support.

Does the NPT need a standing secretariat? Yes, in the view of the Commission. The world should not be without sensible administrative support in handling one of its most important treaties. Such a secretariat should be tasked to organize and prepare the review conferences and their preparatory committee sessions. It should also organize other Treaty-related meetings at the request of a majority of parties.

A more momentous problem with the NPT is the implementation — or, rather, the lack of implementation — of article VI, which enjoins the nuclear-weapon States parties to negotiate towards nuclear disarmament. In its very first recommendation in the report, the Commission submits that all parties to the Treaty should revert to the fundamental and balanced non-proliferation and disarmament commitments made under the Treaty and confirmed in 1995, when the Treaty was extended indefinitely.

It is not — I believe — as if there will be any mass withdrawals from the Treaty by non-nuclear-weapon States because they feel that article VI has not been respected. Most States have joined not principally to obtain a nuclear disarmament pledge from the nuclear-weapon States, but to send a message of assurance regarding their own status and to receive assurances from others, including neighbours. Yet there is a strong feeling of frustration, even of being cheated. The moral authority of the "have" States is undermined when they loosen, rather than restricting, their doctrines on the use of nuclear weapons and when they are in the process of deciding on the development of new types of weapons, rather than considering how they could manage their defence needs with other than nuclear weapons.

I am not contending that negotiations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Iran would be easy under any circumstances. But I suspect that they might be somewhat less difficult if the participating nuclear-weapon States could show that they themselves were actively moving towards — and leading the world towards — nuclear disarmament. While the Commission argues for the goal of a convention outlawing nuclear weapons in a manner similar to what has been done regarding biological and chemical weapons, there are many more modest steps that could and should be taken without delay.

So, what needs to be done? The security of States and peoples must be sought more through cooperation and negotiation and less through military threats and force. The disasters in Iraq and Lebanon show the tragic consequences of an excessive faith in what armed force can achieve. A boosting of the nuclear option in States possessing nuclear weapons, combined with military threats, seems more likely to encourage nuclear proliferation in States that feel threatened than to dissuade them from such proliferation.

Here, I shall go through some of the recommendations of the WMD Commission in relation to nuclear weapons, starting with suggested system-level measures and reforms.

The Security Council is entrusted with a great responsibility. The Council's potential should be used out prudently, consistently and in conformity with the Charter. The Commission's report suggests that the Security Council should establish a small subsidiary unit that could provide professional technical information and advice on matters relating to weapons of mass destruction. At the present juncture, such independent advice would have been of interest as regards the question of the nature of the recent explosion in North Korea. It has not quite yet been established what kind of explosion that was. I might also add that if the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) had been in force, the world could have been well informed about the nature of the explosion through the system of verification that exists within the CTBT office in Vienna.

The Conference of Disarmament at Geneva, the principal international forum for negotiation as regards issues related to weapons of mass destruction, has, as the Committee is aware, been unable to adopt a programme of work for almost a decade. As a result, no substantive issues have been discussed or negotiated in the Conference during that time. That is the unsatisfactory result of a consensus requirement that has its roots in cold war practices. It is hard for public opinion to understand that talks are not taking place. The Commission suggests that, to enable the Commission on Disarmament to function, it should be enabled to make administrative and procedural

decisions, including the adoption of its programme of work, by a qualified majority of two thirds of the membership present and voting.

Furthermore, given the setbacks in arms control and disarmament at the 2005 NPT Review Conference and 2005 World Summit, as well as the continued stalemate, there is, in the view of the Commission, a need to give new impetus to, and reset the stage for, a credible multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation process. The Commission suggests that the General Assembly should convene a world summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. As thorough preparations would be necessary, planning for such a summit should start as soon as possible.

I turn now to a number of the substantive measures that the Commission recommends to reduce the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the dangers of existing arsenals. No measure could be more urgent or important in substance as a signal that arms control and disarmament are again on the world agenda than the signature and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by States that have not yet done so. That is recommendation 28 of the report. If, instead, the Treaty were seen to lapse, there would be an increased risk that some State might restart weapon tests. To demand from North Korea that that country should deposit its ratification of the Treaty — which is necessary for the Treaty to enter into force — would be easier if all the States participating in the Six-Party Talks had themselves, ratified the Treaty, which is not the case.

Negotiating without further delay a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for weapons is the next most urgent issue that the Commission believes should be tackled. The combination of a continued reduction in the number of existing nuclear weapons and a verified closing of the tap for more weapon-fissile material would gradually reduce the world's inventory of bombs. As the Committee is aware, a draft cut-off treaty has been introduced in Geneva. It has important weaknesses, but it should be welcomed as a draft to be discussed.

The Commission is of the view that, for such a treaty to be meaningful, it must provide for effective international verification. Independent international verification is already carried out by the European Atomic Energy Community in two nuclear-weapon States, namely, France and the United Kingdom. Enrichment plants in Brazil and Japan are subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards verification. If there is no effective international verification of a fissile materials cut-off treaty, any controversy about respect for the treaty would have to be discussed on the basis of evidence that came only from national means of verification. We know from the case of Iraq that that would not be satisfactory. Moreover, without independent verification, suspicions about violations might arise and lead to a race between some countries in the production of fissile material.

Further steps by all nuclear-weapon States towards reducing strategic nuclear arsenals would be significant as confidence-building measures allowing for further positive developments. The Commission recommends that the United States and Russia, which have the most nuclear weapons, should take the lead. With increased cooperation between Russia and European Union, Russian tactical nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from forward deployment to central storage, and United States tactical nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from Europe to United States territory.

In the view of the Commission, all States that have nuclear weapons should commit themselves categorically to a policy of no-first-use, and the United States and Russia should reciprocally take their nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.

Given that reliance on nuclear power is expected to increase, we can anticipate the need for greater production of low-enrichment uranium fuel and for the disposal of spent fuel. That must occur in a manner that does not increase the risk of diversion of material and the risk of proliferation. As the Committee is aware, there are various proposals on the table, and possibilities should be explored for international arrangements to ensure the availability of nuclear fuel for civilian reactors while minimizing the risk of weapons proliferation. As the Commission suggests, the IAEA is the most suitable forum for such exploration. Discussions in that regard recently took place at a special event in connection with the IAEA General Conference, and the issue will continue to be discussed at the IAEA.

The Commission is of the view that the production of highly enriched uranium should be phased out.

Regional approaches should also be developed further, especially in sensitive areas. It would, for example, be desirable to obtain commitments from States on the Korean peninsula and in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, that they would accept a verified suspension for a prolonged period of time of any production of enriched uranium and plutonium while obtaining international assurances of the supply of fuel for any civilian nuclear power. That is the subject of the Commission's twelfth recommendation.

Lastly, the Committee will not be surprised to hear me say that international professional inspection — such as has been practiced under the auspices of the United Nations by the Special Commission established pursuant to Security Council resolution 687 (1991), the Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, the IAEA and by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons — is an important, and economical, tool for verification. Such inspection does not in any way stand in contradiction to national means of verification. Rather, those two means of fact-finding supplement each other. Many States have no national means that they can use and should not have to be dependent upon the national intelligence means of other States. States that operate such intelligence may, in a one-way-traffic arrangement, provide information to the international verification system to help to put them on the right track on their investigations. On the other hand, the reports of international organizations offer Governments an opportunity to carry out a quality check on their national systems, as well as to corroborate conclusions they have reached.

I am looking forward to answer any questions that anyone might like to put to me.

The Chairperson: I thank Mr. Blix for his presentation.

It is now my intention to provide the Committee with an opportunity to have an interactive discussion with our panellist by having an informal question and answer session. I will now suspend the meeting in order to continue our discussion in an informal mode.

The meeting was suspended at 10.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

The Chairperson: The Committee will now hear a statement by Mr. John Barrett, Chairman of the Panel of Government Experts on Verification, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Barrett (Panel of Government Experts on Verification): Thank you, Madam Chairperson, for the invitation to come to the First Committee today to give a presentation and update on the work of the Panel of Government Experts on Verification in All its Aspects, including the Role of the United Nations in the Field of Verification.

General Assembly resolution 59/60 established the Panel of Government Experts to "explore the question of verification in all its aspects, including the role of the United Nations in the field of verification" (para. 3). This is the third such United Nations panel on verification; the previous ones were held in 1990 and 1995. The Panel is chaired by Canada; we met for three one-week sessions. The first was held in New York from 30 January to 3 February, the second was held in Geneva from 8 to 12 May and the third was held here at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 11 August.

The final product of our work will be a report. Under United Nations guidelines, the report is under a strict word limitation. The word limitation effectively keeps our report to no more than 16 pages in length. What the Committee will see, provided that we reach a final consensus agreement, will be a relatively short report — certainly by comparison with the previous reports of 1990 and 1995. However, this constraint has inspired Panel members to work towards a relatively short, action-oriented report, which will include some recommendations, for consideration by Member States.

The aim of the Panel has been, from the outset, a consensus report, which we, the Panel members, would submit to the Secretary-General and to this Committee for its consideration and, we hope, for its endorsement. The Chair of the Panel is required to submit his report to the Secretary-General during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, a point to which I shall return a bit later.

Panel members have been acutely aware that our work should be as open as possible to the concerns and views of other Member States. This is not only a matter of transparency, but it also comes from a genuine desire to be as inclusive as possible. We are not writing this report or developing recommendations for the

panel members only. Instead, we are seeking, in a modest but hopefully useful way, to build anew a broad consensus on verification in all its aspects, and on the role of verification in contributing to the security of each and every one of us today and in the future.

I will return to the issue of consensus-building and how we set about addressing this in our work. First though, I would like to say a word or two about the panel composition and its working methods. There are 16 members on the Panel; they are Argentina, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and Ukraine. This membership was determined by geographical representation and interest shown.

Some United Nations Member States initially expressed disappointment at not being selected for the Panel. However, the number of experts on the Panel — 16 — was determined in keeping with a panel's reduced size in comparison with a group. Moreover, the budget was not strong enough to financially support the travel and costs of a larger Panel membership.

Because of the wide interest shown in the subject of verification, Panel members agreed from the very start that the Chair should use whatever opportunities were available to describe our work and the approach taken in the Panel. To this end, the Chair held two lunchtime outreach sessions for United Nations Missions. The first was in New York on 25 April on the margins of the Disarmament Commission's annual meeting; the second outreach session was in Geneva on 11 May on the margins of the Panel's second meeting. One could consider my presentation today as the third in our series of outreach and transparency efforts. That is why I was so eager to accept the kind invitation of the Chairperson of the First Committee to address this Committee during its thematic debate on the subject of verification in all its aspects.

I will now say a word about the Panel's scope and working methods. The Panel's work encompasses nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons, as well as their means of delivery. It also encompasses conventional weapons. We have also looked at verification as it applies to activities involving non-State actors, as well as States.

During the first two sessions, we looked at existing verification regimes in their specific contexts, examining strengths and shortcomings in terms of methods, procedures and technologies. The first session concentrated more on weapons of mass destruction verification. The second shifted the focus more to conventional weapons and to means of delivery. The third session delved a bit deeper into aspects of United Nations arms embargoes and sanctions on illicit transfers of conventional weapons and the role of verification in such circumstances. However, the bulk of the third session was devoted to a detailed, line-by-line reading and discussion of the draft Panel report and its recommendations.

In order to stimulate discussion and provide food for thought, the Chair invited experts from a wide range of non-proliferation and arms control fields to give presentations to the Panel. During our three sessions, the Panel received experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency; the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission; the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004); the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate; the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization; the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs; and the Group of Experts monitoring the arms embargo in regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We heard also from two representatives from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

We also received presentations from a number of experts from non-governmental organizations. We heard from Amy Smithson of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jean Pascal Zanders of the BioWeapons Prevention Project, Michael Krepon of the Stimson Center, Olivia Bosch of Chatham House, Pierre Goldschmidt of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Glenn McDonald of the Small Arms Survey and Mary Wareham of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

In order to further stimulate discussion, the Chair asked Panel members to consider submitting their own short papers on selected aspects of verification. These internal papers were done in the spirit of analysis and reflection and thus have not been more widely circulated by the Chair.

As United Nations Members will know, the Secretary-General invited all States that so wished to submit in written form for the Panel's consideration their views on the subject of verification in all its aspects. The following countries did so: Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Finland, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro as it was then, Suriname and Sweden. On behalf of the Panel, I thank all of those States for their contributions.

Turning to the report, given the short amount of time available to the Panel, the detailed work contained the earlier 1990 and 1995 reports of the respective Groups of Governmental Experts was not revisited. However, it is clear that the Panel's work builds on the foundations laid by those two earlier reports. What we have sought to do in our Panel is to focus in particular on what I would call value added. That means that we have looked at what has changed in the past decade in the international security environment and the security needs of States, and how verification has addressed those needs and could do so in the future. In the light of that approach, the report is structured organically, rather than being institution-centric. We have identified and examined themes relating to verification, not the performance of specific treaty regimes.

We did not believe that, as a Panel, our job was to issue a report card or a critical evaluation of how well an existing verification regime was functioning. Rather, we have tried to be constructive and forward-looking, identifying areas which should be given greater attention by States in making verification a more useful and effective instrument in addressing States' security needs. The Panel also did not try to sit in judgement on issues relating to States' compliance with specific international treaty obligations or political commitments. It was recognized that the responsibility for that kind of judgement belongs in other bodies, not in our Panel. However, that is not to say that the relationship between verification and compliance was neglected. Indeed, the conceptual relationship between the two forms the backbone of the Panel's approach and draft report.

During our discussions, certain themes consistently emerged. Among them were the concept of verification; verification experiences; techniques and methodologies of verification; and the need to build synergies and complementarity among bodies or agencies with responsibilities in the area of monitoring and verification. Other themes also emerged, including capacity-building, both in WMD-related verification and non-WMD, or conventional, verification; the role of the United Nations; and the contribution of civil society in helping to build capacity in certain regions for specific kinds of monitoring.

There are four main chapters in the draft report. These are: the purpose of verification; evolution of the concept of verification in the light of developments since 1995; developments in methods, procedures and technologies for the verification of compliance; and verification and compliance mechanisms. Each chapter comprises background, relevant information, facts and figures; issues, concerns and problems that the Panel feels need to be addressed; possible approaches to addressing such issues and concerns; and general recommendations as to the way forward.

I think that it is important that there be clarity, in this audience in particular, about the nature of the report's draft recommendations. They are not portrayed as quick solutions to all the world's ills. Nor do we have a magic wand that, once waved, will somehow fix verification for eternity. Instead, we have started on broad, general foundations, looking to point the way forward in a practical way on what States may themselves wish to take up and work on together.

Our draft report does not therefore presume to tell the sovereign States Members of the United Nations what they should or should not do in the area of verification. Indeed, we do not use the word "should", as it implies a prescriptive quality which we did not want to bring into the report. We talked instead of "could", because the decisions ultimately lie with Member States.

What the report tries to do is develop the basis for a new and widening consensus on the relationship of verification to the security of all States and on how its role could be enhanced in contributing to that security. Verification, as we say emphatically in the draft report, is a toolbox into which we can put very useful instruments to enhance our security, if States have the will and determination to do so.

Finally, I would like to say a couple of words on the way forward. After the first session of the Panel, the Chair compiled a draft narrative report which contained emerging ideas that were brought out of the Panel's discussions. Draft recommendations, based on the initial narrative report and on discussions that

followed, were presented to members at the completion of the second session. Suggestions and comments were received, and the recommendations were reworked in the light of this feedback.

Nearly all of the third session in August, as I mentioned earlier, was devoted to intense discussion and line-by-line scrutiny of the narrative part of the draft report and its recommendations. Unfortunately, on the last day of our meeting, and just as we were on the verge of a consensus text, we ran out of time. We needed further discussion on several key points that were very, very close to agreement, but we were not quite there yet.

As a result, and with the full support of Panel members, the Chair decided to end that meeting "on an interim basis" and declared that the Chair would continue consultations to explore the prospect of reaching agreement on the text. Since then, I have indeed been carrying out consultations, and I am optimistic that we can settle the remaining differences in the near future.

These differences, I would strongly underline, are in the narrative and descriptive parts of the text, not in the fundamental part of the recommendations. The differences have to do with how much we say about one thing or how little about another. It is like having the old-fashioned scales that you might see in a shop, where the shopkeeper first puts the bigger weights on the scales to find the balance. Then, as the balance gets ever closer and finer, he adds a pinch here, takes away a leaf or two there, and a balance is found. We are now at that stage of finding the right pinch here and there.

So it is with this text. But that has meant that we have been unable to submit the Panel's report to the First Committee in time for its consideration this autumn. Even if we reach our final agreement in the next weeks, which is certainly not out of the question, we cannot satisfy the translation and preparation requirements in time. Unfortunately, we have just missed that deadline.

Yet, despite this, I am optimistic and confident that we will be able to present to the First Committee during the course of the sixty-first session a report that reflects the consensus of all Panel members. And I believe that that would be an important achievement and worthy of the Committee's consideration, indeed of its endorsement, as a useful, practical compendium of observations, analyses and recommendations on this key subject of verification in all its aspects.

And now I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have regarding the work of the Panel of Government Experts on Verification.

The Chairperson: I thank Mr. Barrett for his presentation. It is my intention to provide the Committee with the opportunity to have an interactive discussion with our guest speaker by having an informal question and answer session. I will again suspend the meeting in order to continue our discussion in an informal mode.

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

The Chairperson: The Committee will now continue with its thematic debate on conventional weapons. I will now give the floor to delegations that have been unable to make statements on conventional weapons so far. There is still a long list of speakers on the issue of conventional weapons, so I plead with representatives to try to be as brief as possible. I would like to add that I think that we have had a very positive and active interactive debate so far within the thematic clusters, and I think that that is something that we should appreciate and value, even if we are running a little behind schedule.

Ms. Millar (Australia): I am taking the floor to raise several issues of the utmost importance in this discussion on conventional weapons.

A little over nine years ago, States agreed in Oslo to the text of a Convention to ban anti-personnel landmines. That text has entered into force as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction. Today, there are 151 States parties to the Convention, which, since its introduction, has made significant headway in ridding the world, once and for all, of the suffering caused by those insidious weapons. Thirty-three of the States that previously manufactured mines have become States parties; 38 million mines have been destroyed, and another 10 million are scheduled to be destroyed by 12 States parties; seven of 52 States parties affected by landmines have cleared their mined areas, including, most recently, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and for the first time, a disarmament treaty is addressing effectively the needs of survivors.

Australia is honoured to have been appointed to the presidency of the Seventh Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, which concluded in Geneva last month. At that meeting, the States parties made significant headway in their effort to address the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. Most important, the Meeting adopted a process to assist States parties in fulfilling their obligations to clear and destroy all known landmines.

The Meeting also discussed practical measures to assist landmine survivors and make progress on implementation of other aspects of the Convention. Australia was pleased to announce at that Meeting our Government's recent decision to provide a second tranche of multi-year funding for mine action: $75 million over five years. Copies of the Australian mine action strategy are available for delegations at the back of this room. We also announced an Action Plan for the universalization of the Convention. As part of this, Australia will fund a small States workshop to promote adherence and implementation among States in South-East Asia and the Pacific. As President, we will contact States not party so as to encourage ratification or accession. Australia will also present to the First Committee a draft resolution on the implementation of the Convention.

The international community made far less progress when it met to consider implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons earlier this year. That was a great disappointment for Australia, for we are witness to the terrible consequences of the illicit production and transfer of small arms and light weapons in our region without regard to the vulnerability of small States.

The international community needs to take firm action to implement the Programme of Action. For that reason, Australia welcomes the proposed omnibus draft resolution (A/C.1/61/L.15) on small arms and light weapons, including its scheduling of a biennial meeting by no later than 2008. But States must make the most of this opportunity by ensuring that the biennial meeting is focused on practical steps to implement the Programme of Action.

Australia is also very pleased to be a co-author of draft resolution A/C.1/61/L.55, entitled "Towards an arms trade treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms". The absence of common international standards on the trade in and transfer of conventional arms is a contributing factor to conflict, crime and terrorism, thereby undermining peace and security. A legally binding instrument which establishes common international standards on the trade and transfer of conventional weapons would help to address these negative consequences. Australia urges States to support the draft resolution by sponsoring it.

Last year, Australia presented a draft resolution (A/C.1/60/L.49/Rev.1) on preventing the illicit transfer of and unauthorized access to and use of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS). We welcomed the Committee's decision to adopt that draft resolution by consensus. Australia will not this year be presenting a revised text to the First Committee, consistent with our support for efforts to improve the work of the Committee through biennialization. However, the need for States to implement General Assembly resolution 60/77 remains undiminished. States need to implement effective controls over the production, storage and transfer of such weapons so as to prevent their misuse by non-State actors, in particular terrorists.

A seminar hosted by the Australian Permanent Mission in Geneva in June this year highlighted a range of national, bilateral and international measures to combat MANPADS proliferation. Participants heard how effective launch-denial strategies can reduce the risk of attack from areas close to the flight paths of major civilian airports; how one State's bilateral cooperation programme has secured and destroyed some 18,500 surplus MANPADS in 18 countries since 2003; and how better controls over intellectual property and originator licensing for re-export could help counter MANPADS proliferation.

Australia continues to play a leading role in the Asia-Pacific region in helping to build the capacity of countries to manage the security of their MANPADS stockpiles. This week, Australia is co-hosting, with Thailand, an Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum workshop, which provides an opportunity for participant States to share information on stockpile management best practice and to discuss the potential for future capacity-building assistance.

I am pleased to announce that the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations here in New York will shortly issue invitations to delegations for a seminar on 2 November to explore further those and other measures States can take to help prevent the

proliferation of MANPADS to non-State actors. We look forward to delegations' attendance at that important seminar.

Mr. Reiterer (Austria): As my delegation is taking the floor for the first time this session, allow me to congratulate you, Madam, on your election as Chairperson of the First Committee and on the way in which you have been guiding our work over the past two weeks.

As I also have the honour of speaking immediately after the representative of Australia, I would like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to her country for its role in the presidency of the Seventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, and to congratulate her for a very successful and constructive meeting.

Let me turn now to the subject of my statement. Here, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Holy See, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden and my own country, Austria.

Over recent months we have witnessed growing interest in the issue of cluster munitions and cluster bombs, not only in the relevant United Nations disarmament bodies, but also throughout the whole world. We have serious concerns about the consequences of the inhumane use of cluster munitions. We are of the view that existing general rules of international humanitarian law have not been adequately applied in many instances in which these munitions have been used. Recent events have again shown that, in addition to the question of the reliability of such weapons, specific rules need to be established addressing their use during conflict situations, particularly in or close to concentrations of civilians. We believe such rules need to be established urgently.

During the meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Third Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), held in September 2006 in Geneva, we expressed our conviction that negotiations should begin on a legally binding instrument that addresses the humanitarian concerns posed by cluster munitions. To make it clear, this is not a proposal for a total ban on cluster munitions.

It is for those reasons that we have made a proposal for a mandate to negotiate such an instrument; for ease of reference, a copy of the proposal is attached to the written version of this statement. We urge all States to support this proposal at the forthcoming CCW Review Conference to be held in November 2006 in Geneva.

Mr. Van Gucht (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time my delegation is taking the floor, I would like to begin, Madam, by congratulating you on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee.

My delegation, of course, endorses the statement made by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union. However, I would like to provide some complementary information on Belgium's position on the question of cluster munitions weapons.

Legislation banning cluster munitions weapons entered into force in Belgium on 9 June. Certain types of weapons are, however, excluded from the legal definition of cluster munitions weapons, because they do not give rise to the same problems from the point of view of humanitarian law. I am referring in particular to weapons that cannot detonate on contact or as a result of the presence or proximity of an individual. In adopting that law, Belgian legislators showed that they realized the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of the use of cluster munitions weapons. And the fact that in places such as Lebanon Belgian soldiers are now clearing areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war, particularly cluster munitions, is an illustration of my country's commitment on the ground.

Having taken that national measure, Belgium is now logically pressing for multilateral negotiations to be undertaken as quickly as possible, with a view to a common response to the humanitarian concerns engendered by the use of cluster munitions. To that end, we would probably need to move forward step by step, while ensuring that the process is inclusive and guided by a clear and consensual vision of objective to be attained.

In that spirit, it is our view that the first step should be to renew the current mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts on explosive remnants of war beyond the next CCW Review Conference. We think that it would be advantageous to make the mandate more specific, to ensure that the discussion can focus on the priority theme of cluster munitions. The objective, through the continued work of the Group of Governmental Experts, is to create conditions for the broadest possible consensus in favour of measures that

would significantly improve the current situation. Belgium will participate enthusiastically and with determination in the negotiations that will be carried out in this framework.

Mr. Čekuolis (Lithuania): I take this opportunity to speak on the subject of illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons. My Government feels strongly that there is a need to address this issue effectively and urgently. While Lithuania does not produce weapons, we recognized early on that legitimate brokering activities require proper national legislation and institutional controls. However, these measures are not enough when even minimal global standards for brokering controls are absent.

Numerous illicit or undesirable arms transfers to festering conflict areas and human rights abusers have been facilitated by illicit brokering, thus fuelling violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. These middlemen organize arms transfers or services between two or more parties, often bringing together buyers, sellers, transporters and financiers to make a deal. Often such brokers do not reside in the country where the weapons originate; nor do they live in transit countries or in those for which the weapons are destined. It is difficult, to say the least, to trace, monitor or control them.

The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in 2001 at the United Nations Conference on Small Arms, has been vital in this regard. The Programme of Action specifically promotes the regulation of brokering activities to prevent illicit transfers without impeding legitimate brokering activities.

During the years since the adoption of the Programme of Action, a number of States, especially in Europe, have established national legislation on arms brokering. Many initiatives have been launched in regional and subregional forums. Regionally, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, NATO's Operation Active Endeavor, the members of the Wassenaar Arrangement and the European Union have addressed this issue and have agreed to enforce strict controls on arms brokers and brokering activities by introducing and implementing adequate laws and regulations.

A great deal of progress has been made; however, shortcomings and loopholes remain. The formation of a Group of Governmental Experts to consider further steps to enhance international cooperation in preventing, combating and eliminating illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons provides a timely and welcome opportunity to discuss global measures on small arms brokering and elements for effective national controls. As a member of the Group, Lithuania believes that it should build on the valuable work that was done by the Group in 2001. The Group will also benefit from broad geographical representation, which will bring different experiences, perspectives and views on such issues as a definition of illicit brokering, brokering-related activities, the need for extraterritorial controls, linkages between the inadequacy of end-user certificates and illicit brokering, and transportation.

We hope the work of the Group will allow the United Nations membership to constructively engage on how to further develop national and international norms against illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Luaces (United States of America): Our delegation takes the floor this morning to address two conventional arms control issues: the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the issue of missiles in all its aspects.

First, however, our delegation wishes to commend the Security Council for its adoption on Saturday, 14 October, by a unanimous vote, of Council resolution 1718 (2006), which imposes sanctions against North Korea in response to its claimed nuclear test on 9 October. This resolution is legally binding on all United Nations Member States, in accordance with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

By enacting resolution 1718 (2006), the Security Council has sent an unambiguous message to North Korea that it must eliminate its nuclear weapons and nuclear programmes and halt its development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missiles. Resolution 1718 (2006) requires all Member States to prevent materials, resources and technology that could be used for weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles and certain armaments listed in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms from going to or from North Korea. The resolution also freezes financial assets that support such activities, precludes travel by persons supporting such activities

and imposes other, related sanctions. Finally, resolution 1718 (2006) calls on Member States to take cooperative action to implement and enforce its terms, including, as necessary, through the inspection of cargo travelling to or from North Korea.

It is crucial that all States work together to take concrete action to implement Security Council resolution 1718 (2006) expeditiously. Only thus can Governments make clear to the leadership of North Korea that its provocative and destabilizing actions are unacceptable and that they will be countered.

Our delegation now would like to turn its attention to resolution 46/36 L, which established a multi-step process to put into operation a voluntary register of conventional arms transfers. The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms was intended to help prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms, in order to promote stability and strengthen international peace and security, taking into account the legitimate security needs of States and the principle of undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments. Member States were called upon to provide annually to the Secretary-General relevant data on imports and exports of conventional arms to be included in the Register. Member States were also invited to report on their military holdings and procurement through national production and relevant policies.

By any measure, the Register has been a resounding success, establishing an international norm of transparency and accountability in military matters and reinforcing civilian control of the military. During its 15 years of operation, annual participation in the Register has ranged from 85 to 126 States. More than 170 States have participated in the Register at least once, 142 States have participated three or more times, 101 States have participated at least seven times and 50 States have participated every year.

By reporting on both imports and exports, the seven categories under the Register have captured the vast majority of the international conventional arms trade. Even though some States may not participate in a given year, or may have never participated, the Register captures transfers involving many of those States. For 2004, the latest completed calendar year, the activities of 22 countries that did not participate that year, several of which have never participated in the Register, were captured in reports submitted by other countries. The United States continues to make it a strong objective to universalize annual participation in the Register.

Groups of governmental experts convened by the Secretary-General have conducted periodic reviews of the Register's operation and made recommendations on its further development in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003 and 2006. The first three concluded that the seven existing categories within the Register adequately covered the weapons of most concern to the international community. However, feedback received from a series of regional and subregional workshops held between 2001 and 2005 pushed the last two groups of governmental experts to make substantive changes to the Register. Those workshops revealed overwhelming support for increasing the utility of the Register by having it report transfers of small arms and light weapons as well. The 2003 Group of Governmental Experts responded by adding man-portable air defence systems, lowering the artillery threshold from 100 millimetres to 75 millimetres and opening the door to voluntary reporting of transfers of small arms and light weapons.

Under the direction of the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Argentine Republic, this year's Group of Governmental Experts opened the door further by agreeing to an optional standardized form for reporting transfers of small arms and light weapons and by recommending that States in a position to do so report such transfers to the Register. The Group of Governmental Experts also agreed to lower the reporting threshold for warships and submarines from 750 metric tons to 500 metric tons. Those substantive additions demonstrate the continuing vitality and relevance of the Register.

Secretary-General Annan summed up the role of the Register in his foreword to the report by this year's Group of Governmental Experts to the General Assembly as follows:

> "The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms plays a valuable role in the world's efforts to discourage the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms." (*A/61/261, Introduction, p. 5*)
>
> "At a time when the international community faces major challenges in pursuing disarmament and upholding the non-proliferation

regime, the positive outcome of the Group's deliberations is especially welcome." (*supra*)

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the United States support for the Register. We encourage all Governments, as applicable, to consider or to continue submitting annual reports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as a global confidence-building measure in the field of conventional armaments.

With regard to the issue of missiles in all its aspects, the United States notes that the third Panel of Governmental Experts on the issue of missiles in all its aspects is to begin work in 2007. The two earlier Panels devoted extensive and valuable work to producing a report on that topic, and our delegation would not like to see their efforts wasted. Specifically, the second Panel produced a final draft report that represents near consensus. We believe that the work of the third Panel should be based on that nearly completed final report, rather than begin the process all over again, thereby repeating work that has already been conducted. Our delegation considers that, despite its obvious value as a resource for next year's Panel, the new report on missiles by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research is neither suited nor appropriate, for a variety of reasons, to serve as the basis on which the third Panel of Governmental experts on missiles in all its aspects should complete this work during 2007.

Mr. Kolesnik (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Republic of Belarus shares the concerns associated with the illicit arms trade. We support the efforts of the international community aimed at ending that trade. Belarus also favours the full implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspect. We reaffirmed our principled position in that regard at last July's Review Conference. Although, unfortunately, the Conference was unable to adopt a final document, we do not believe that to be grounds for inaction.

On the national level, the Government of Belarus is continuing to take steps towards the implementation of the Programme of Action. In particular, we have adopted a series of normative acts aimed at improving national laws governing export controls. We are currently working to improve the system for the gathering and analysis of information regarding the monitoring of transfers of small arms and light weapons. At the same time, working with other countries under the aegis of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), we have embarked upon the implementation of a major project to enhance the security of stockpiled small arms and light weapons and man-portable air defence systems. Belarus is open to cooperation with all countries. We express our gratitude for the efforts of all Member States, groups of States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to implement the Programme of Action.

As I have stated, the lack of a final document at the Review Conference should not impede the development of new measures aimed at combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Belarus favours the strengthening of brokering controls in the trade in small arms and light weapons. We also encourage the earliest possible conclusion of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts dealing with this matter. We believe the time has come to begin a substantive discussion, both in the context of the Programme of Action and of other forums, on the question of strengthening controls over the transfer of small arms and light weapons to non-State entities and groups.

It is also urgent that we develop and adopt an additional set of measures to counter the uncontrolled supply of man-portable air defence systems. We would also like to reaffirm our readiness to participate in discussions about initiatives associated with the lawful trade in small arms and light weapons with a view to curbing the illicit trade in weapons. We believe that the provisions of future agreements should not limit the right of Governments to self-defence and to engage in the legal trade in armaments. That must be based upon existing and agreed criteria and principles in the field of the control of conventional weapons. We believe that the creation, in practice, of universal and effective mechanisms for monitoring small arms and light weapons is possible, only if the views of all participating Member States are taken into account. The improvement of control mechanisms over armaments requires the support and development of confidence-building measures and transparency in this field.

In that context, we support the recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts with regard to the development of the United Nations Register on

Conventional Weapons. The Republic of Belarus has regularly, since 1992, been submitting data to the United Nations Register and we intend to continue that practice in the future.

In recent years, considerable progress has been made in attaining the universalization of the Ottawa Convention on banning anti-personnel mines. This year, Belarus has begun the practical implementation of two projects on the elimination of stockpiles of anti-personnel mines. Under one project with NATO, by the end of 2006 we plan to terminate the use of ordinary mines. Under the second project, working with the European Commission, over the next two years, Belarus intends to destroy more than 3 million anti-personnel mines of the type PFM-1. We are convinced that, with the help of our partners, the projects will be concluded successfully.

The Republic of Belarus welcomes the conclusion to work on the translation into all of the official languages of the United Nations of Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and we express the hope that the process will make it easier for countries that have not yet acceded for that reason to be able to do so now.

At the national level, Belarus has already begun to consider the question of acceding to Protocol V to the Convention on Inhumane Weapons.

Mr. Moussotsi (Gabon) *(spoke in French)*: My delegation would like to take the floor today on the important item of conventional weapons in order to clearly restate its position on the outcome of the Review Conference on the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, adopted in July 2001. My delegation would also like to reaffirm its commitment to the spirit and letter of the Programme of Action and all the initiatives to fight the scourge of illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

The lack of a final document following the Review Conference of the Programme of Action should not constitute an excuse not to implement the Programme. For my country, the lack of an outcome document that would reward the hard work of the Conference does not take anything away from the relevance of the important dialogue that took place at the Review Conference for the Programme of Action. Nor does it question the vitality and competence of the Bureau of that Conference. This regrettable stage in our fight against the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons should not signal the end of our fight to eradicate that scourge. Along with the continuation of those efforts we must continue to implement the Programme of Action and the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, adopted in 2005.

We are encouraged by the fact that since the adoption of the Programme of Action, many countries — namely those of the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community — have begun implementation of the Programme of Action, by either imposing a moratorium or adopting legally binding instruments to fight small arms and light weapons. That commitment on the part of States — some of whom are affected by the scourge of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons — was not supported by sufficient financial assistance, which limited those implementation efforts.

As far as Gabon is concerned, we have strengthened our legal regime and have set up national mechanisms to fight the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. We intend to continue those efforts in cooperation with other countries in the subregion of Central Africa.

We wish also to stress the need for follow-up to the implementation of the Programme of Action by holding biennial meetings of review conferences. The eradication of the destabilizing phenomenon of the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons is not only a security imperative, but a development imperative as well if we consider the tremendous harm done to the economic fabric by bloody conflicts exacerbated by small arms and light weapons. It is true that small arms and light weapons alone do not provoke armed conflicts, but without them the scope and duration of such conflicts would be diminished.

The illegal exploitation of natural resources and other sources of wealth, as well as the involvement of children in armed conflicts are also situations that stem from the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. For that reason, the fight against that illicit trafficking must, in our opinion, be accompanied by the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural

resources. Arms merchants must also avoid transfers of small arms and light weapons to conflict zones.

The fight against the acquisition and illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons must be carried out on a global level and there should be no weak link in the chain. That is especially true since no country can claim to be immune to the harmful effects of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

We are, therefore, forced to step up our cooperation, in particular through the exchange of information and experience. The working group set up to discuss the adoption of a legally binding instrument on brokering must also begin its work and propose concrete measures to eliminate illegal brokering. My country is currently closely reviewing the proposal designed to develop a treaty on the standards that should guide and control the trade in small arms and light weapons.

The question of anti-personnel mines is also very disturbing to my delegation, owing to the untold suffering caused by those explosive devices to their victims. The presence of anti-personnel mines is also an obstacle to the socio-economic development of the countries affected, as they prevent the rural activities that provide the livelihood of a majority of the people in those areas in developing countries.

Gabon, as a party to the Ottawa Convention, would like to reaffirm its commitment to the five-year Nairobi Programme of Action adopted during the 2004 Review Conference, with a view to achieving a world that is free of anti-personnel mines.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to remind arms manufacturers that they have a moral duty and the responsibility to ensure that their weapons should end up in safe and responsible hands and that they should be used for security reasons and in the general interest of the populations of States acquiring them.

The Chairperson: We still have some delegations wishing to make statements on conventional weapons. Therefore, I will allow those remaining delegations to make their statements tomorrow. I will also give the opportunity to delegations to speak on today's thematic debate, on other disarmament measures and international security, before we begin our thematic discussion on regional disarmament and security.

We will also have an informal exchange with the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and the three directors of the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament.

We have been working very hard in recent weeks and I wish to give special thanks to our interpreters. They have done a very good job. I would also like very much to thank the sound engineers and the conference and documents officers for the tremendous work they are doing for our Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.